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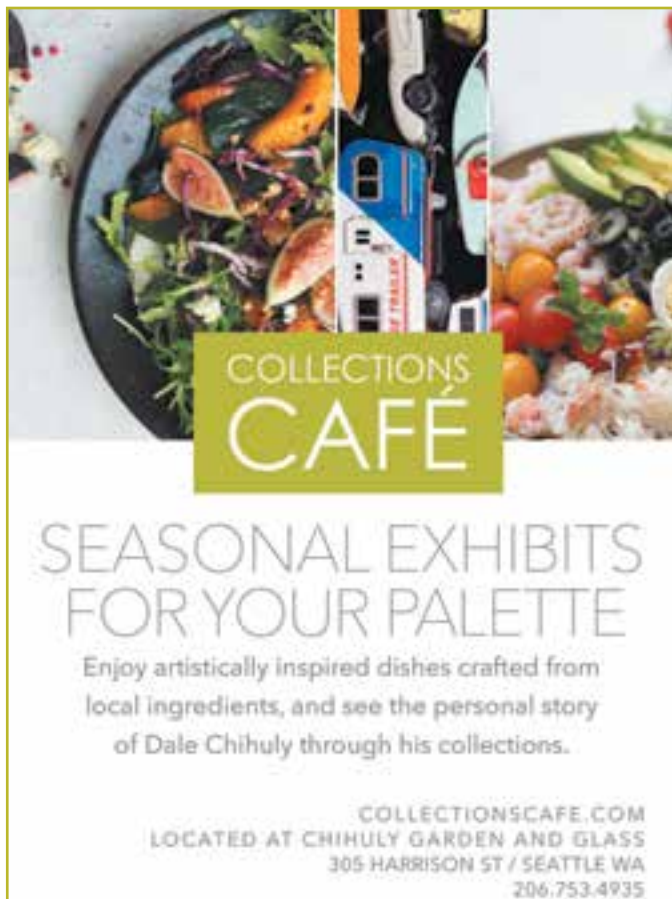
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The Stranger's Food & Drink Spring 2018

WELL DONE & RARE EDITION



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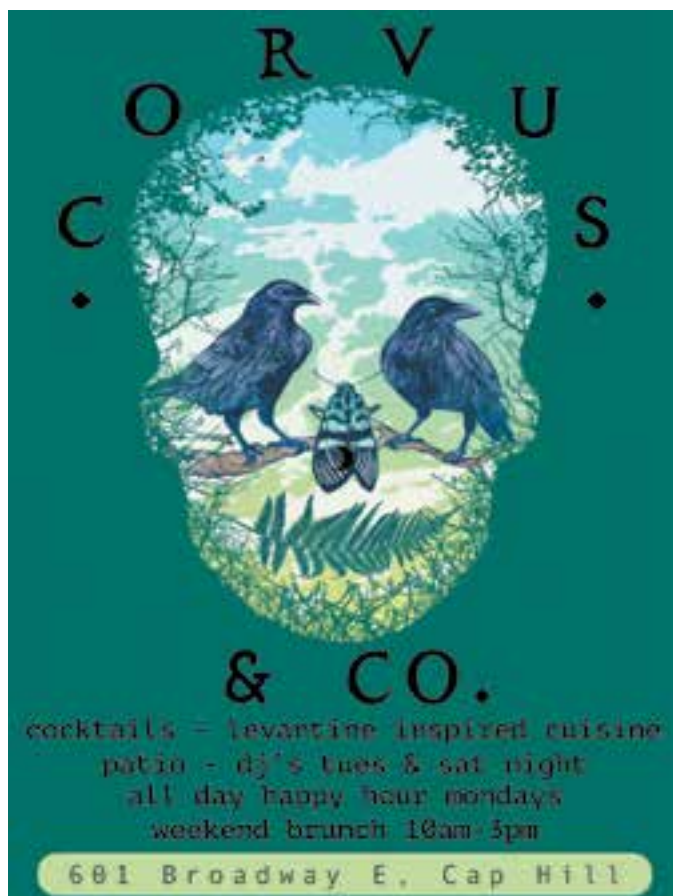
Our favorites of Seattle's most bountiful tastes
and where to find more elusive flavors.

Seattle's food scene is incredible. According to a recent *Seattle Times* report, in the first quarter of 2017, our city had 2,696 actively operating establishments, from restaurants to food trucks to caterers. This number is 25 percent higher than a decade ago, and not only that, the survival rate for restaurants in their first year of operation here is higher than the national average, remaining around 87 percent since 2008. Seattle restaurants are a \$3-billion-a-year industry.

To make matters even more interesting, the offerings you find all over town are exceptionally

varied. So much so that it's often hard to decide just where to go, especially when it comes to the food Seattle is known for. Hence, the theme of this edition of *The Stranger's Food & Drink: Well Done*, a breakdown of tastes that Seattle does better than anywhere (Vietnamese food, coffee, Thai food, craft beer, and seafood), and *Rare*, suggestions on where to find those more hard-to-find cuisines around town (Southern food and barbecue, gluten-free eats, and Jewish food), and even a few restaurants serving fare you can't find anywhere else in town.

You have a lot of eating to do.



Coffee

Seattle has a bounty of
fantastic coffee places.

Here are our favorite 15.

WELL
DONE

BY STRANGER STAFF

If there's one thing that Seattle does well, it's coffee. Starbucks started here, and as of 2017, there were 27,339 locations all over the world.

While we're not here to promote Starbucks, its very ubiquity is proof that our city knows how to please the masses, at least as far as coffee is concerned.

While most of us java lovers end up patronizing the chain for one reason or another (no other convenient options, unshakable craving for a Frappuccino®, etc.), there are a bounty of non-corporate shops here that are far more deserving of your patronage.

Each of us has our own favorite spot to grab a cup, sometimes many. It's not only about the quality of the brew (though this is the biggest deciding factor), but other individual characteristics that keep us coming back, whether it's a welcoming atmosphere, particularly adept and amiable baristas, groovy music piping overhead, incredible Wi-Fi (and a general lack of people around to share it with), delectable baked goods—or perhaps a perfect storm of a few or many of these things. Here are 15 coffee shops that we love the most, broken down by neighborhood, so that you have plenty of options to get a great cup of (not Starbucks) coffee no matter where you may be.

White Center's

Dubsea Coffee

BALLARD/CROWN HILL

The Dane

The idea behind the Dane was a “third place” (meaning not home or work) for people of all ages to hang out—kind of a community center, in the style of a European public house. Except, you know, with espresso. Celebrating its first birthday this March, the slick, blond-wooded, Scandinavian-inspired Dane in Crown Hill has come a long way since its opening, adding a kids’ story hour (in the separate kids’ wing), live music, and a weekly tamale pop-up shop. But it’s best known as a work-from-homers’ cafe, with numerous outlets and strong Wi-Fi. Beer taps rotate weekly, and they serve Stumptown Coffee (with extra-Instagrammable latte art), lovely pastries from Salmonberry Goods, and pretty little sandwiches—both Danish smørrebrød-style and regular two-pieces-of-bread style. It’s easy to accidentally camp out there with your laptop all day: begin with coffee and a cardamom bun, have yourself a salmon smørrebrød when lunchtime rolls around, then start in on the beer list once it’s time to knock off. **MEGAN VAN HUYGEN**

CAPITOL HILL

Analog Coffee

I come for the cups. The colored cups. They’re beautiful. Others come to sit on the couches and read stacks of contemporary art comix piled up on the coffee table. Still others come to sit outside with a 12 ounce drip of Herkimer Coffee and watch the people wander down Summit Avenue on a lazy Sunday afternoon. The service is warm and casual, and the staff is always listening to music that’s much more interesting than the kind you have at home. If you’re hungry, head around the corner to their new cafe B-side Foods. The toast is fucking delicious. **RICH SMITH**

Cafe Argento

This April, Cafe Argento celebrates 14 years as a linchpin in Capitol Hill’s 12th Avenue community, with its success owed to owner/local saint Faizel Khan and the Velocity Dance performers he keeps hiring. If you come into Argento

more than once, odds are Faizel will remember your name, your order, and offer you some quirky-good advice. (He suggested my boyfriend get Botox for his 32nd birthday, which continues to make me cackle to this day.) Also, the food is cheap and savory. I’d like to eat their jalapeño cheddar bagel every day until I die. **CHASE BURNS**

Espresso Vivace

Throughout much of Western Europe, the way to consume coffee is through a quick shot or several sips of espresso—just enough to enjoy the flavor and get the caffeine without loading the body with unnecessary water, cream, and sugar. I always thought of this as snobbery (I am a proud American), until I tried Vivace’s Northern Italian-style espresso.



ELIZABETH CROOK

Any Vivace drink with espresso is strong, but without the acrid bitterness typically associated with an espresso shot. Even better, the Broadway spot eschews the pretentiousness of other Capitol Hill coffee shops, and even has a quiet room in the back that welcomes gig economy workers. There, you can savor a revelatory latte and still chow down on an Oreo covered in chocolate, American-style. (Located in South Lake Union, too.) **SYDNEY BROWNSTONE**

Porchlight Coffee

Unlike the rest of us losers, owner Zack Bolotin did the thing we all said we’d do in high school—opened up a cool coffee shop that sells records. The vinyl selection is modest but well-curated, and it’s especially good for those who still read Pitchfork. Otherwise, the shop is a fastidiously clean, well-lit purveyor of Herkimer Coffees (the best), Mighty-O Donuts (why not?), and bagels all stacked up like a tower. Whatever you do, don’t ask Bolotin about baseball, or else you’ll never get out of there. **RICH SMITH**

CENTRAL DISTRICT

Cortona Cafe

Now surrounded by shiny new apartments, pot shops, and cafes with more laptops than humans, Cortona Café is a

or homemade waffles, with or without powdered sugar, fresh fruit, and—more decadent yet—espresso, chocolate, and whipped cream. Really, what more could you want? **KATIE HERZOG**

COLUMBIA CITY

Empire Espresso

Dim gold lighting, softly piping indie rock, and friendly baristas makes this corner shop the ideal setting for a relaxed Sunday afternoon typing away at your unfinished work. Empire Espresso recently switched their coffee source. Once, they almost exclusively served Kuma coffee, which we never complained about. Roughly three months ago, the shop started using beans roasted in co-owner Ian Peters’s garage.

Porchlight Coffee

on Capitol Hill

throwback to what the Central District may have been like before white hipsters moved in. It’s not polished, or lavish, and there’s nary a white subway tile or ironic neon sign to be found. Instead, what you get is good coffee, friendly baristas, and a parklet outside where you can watch young couples take their labradoodles and/or their children on walks. The menu is limited—there’s a smattering of pastries, and you can order warm empanadas, vegan pop-tarts,

The change is welcome. Don’t miss happy hour here, when they take \$1 off beer and wine, and serve up grilled cheese for \$2.50. It’s a perfect prelude to a movie at Ark Lodge Cinemas, which doesn’t serve alcohol. **STEVEN HSIEH**

FREMONT

Vif Wine|Coffee

Vif is a glass jewel box at the top of the hill on Fremont Avenue. It’s a



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Zeitgeist Coffee

in Pioneer Square



ELIZABETH CROOK

tiny, square cafe, but the wall-to-wall windows flood it with light. Catching an afternoon sunbreak in Vif during the middle of winter can be downright religious. If you want to feel precious, order their brew made from Olympia Coffee Roasting Company's beans, flip through the design mags, and listen to the rich people next to you whisper about their problems. You'll giggle. Vif also makes a great quiche.

CHASE BURNS

GREENWOOD

Makeda & Mings

This secret little coffee spot is tucked around the corner from the main drag, at 78th and Greenwood. From 2008 to 2015, it was known as Makeda Coffee, until they started doing events at night and added beer and wine to the mix. Now it's called Makeda & Mings, which is the name of owner Prashanthi Reddy's rat terrier. "Mings is meant to describe the artistic aesthetic, to make it seem like it's open in the evening, too," says Reddy. "It's a jazz word." Lately, the cafe has featured live music, dance parties, crafting nights, and Indian food on Thursdays. During the day, though, it's super chill, with colorful '90s-esque wall art, chalk murals, and handmade Black Lives Matter posters. Coffee

is from Seven Roasters, which once operated in the same space, and QED, both out of South Seattle, with pastries by Mighty-O Donuts and the nonpareil bakery Le Fournil. Really cute spot.

MEGAN VAN HUYGEN

HILLMAN CITY

Tin Umbrella

As Rainier Valley's only coffee roastery, Tin Umbrella is carefully crafting international and local coffee blends while upholding the meaning of community in the South End. A local hot spot for work or leisure, you'll often find families and friends visiting around one of the few small tables inside or at the sidewalk park out front, and a new word of the day scribbled in different languages on the small chalkboard by the register. While they serve tasty treats (hello, sunrise tacos!), the real standout is the coffee—notably the Beach blend, dubbed "a top-secret blend of coffee, rainbows, and magic to warm your heart" that's a nod to neighboring Rainier Beach, not to mention a great medium-bodied afternoon delight. All proceeds from the blend support two local women-owned businesses (Beach Bakery and Tin Umbrella!). Don't miss their killer cold-brew out this spring/summer. **KARA TIERNAN**

INTERNATIONAL DISTRICT

Eastern Cafe

There isn't much outside of the Starbucks, Tully's, and Specialty's triad, all situated in a cluster in that giant office complex adjacent to the ID's Fifth Avenue transportation hub. But venture a few blocks down King Street and hang a right on Maynard Avenue, and Eastern Cafe awaits; its softly-lit two levels of loft-style seating is never too packed, while the air is always filled with the most delectable aromas of the sweet and savory crepes they serve alongside brews by local staple Lighthouse Coffee. The cups are about \$1 less than you get elsewhere, it has a sort of hipster appeal without feeling pretentious, and the bohemian baristas take orders with laid-back ease and ready smiles. They also offer sandwiches, scrambles, and an assortment of baked goods, and serve beer (draft and bottles) and wine (by the glass), with happy hour from 4 to 7 p.m. every day. **LEILANI POLK**

PIONEER SQUARE

Zeitgeist Coffee

This coffee shop was one of the first classic Seattle cafes, with exposed brick walls, well-made coffee, beautiful cabinetry, and art. The interior



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is vaguely industrial, the tables are plentiful, and the people who work behind the counter are musicians and artists. First Thursday art walk is a great time to stop by—although any other time is great, too. Plus, if you're hungry, they have grilled sandwiches on offer, and if you're on your way to the Amtrak station (or killing time waiting for someone to arrive by train), it's only two blocks away. Plus, the seats in the front windows offer excellent people-watching opportunities.

CHRISTOPHER FRIZZELLE

U-DISTRICT

Sureshot Espresso

The capital of the Ave, the Evergreen State College of coffee shops, Sureshot is a grunge-era institution, a relic of yester-Seattle that somehow sojourns on, baffling us all. This place could only exist on the Ave—it's basically a living room for crust punks and hobos, everyone with their pit bulls and backpacks in tow. The coffee is solid, the pastries are vegan, and the soups are always dope. Bike cops routinely show up looking for spare-changing suspects. A philosophical debate group meets here weekly, and it's popular with chess players. When I lived in the U-District, I came here with my laptop every single morning for six years or so, and loitered all day long. I was never met with anything but soft-spoken, hippieshit kindness—especially from Will, who's worked there for a thousand years and is the gentlest soul I know. Support and protect Sureshot Espresso, god, please.

MEGAN VAN HUYGEN

WALLINGFORD

Stone Way Cafe

Whether you're in the mood for live music, happy hour on the patio, or head down in a good book, Stone Way Cafe is really the best place in the neighborhood for all of the above. Their food is where it's at, with breakfast burritos in the morning (stuffed with crispy bacon, egg, veggies, and pico de gallo), and feel-good-you're-eating-your-greens dishes like the roasted butternut squash and kale tacos in the afternoon. The Wi-Fi is consistently fast if you're looking for a great place to hunker down and work, and they generally have four or five Ballard beers and a rotating kombucha on tap if you're looking for a low-key spot to hang with friends. Oh yeah, there's coffee, too.

KARA TIERNAN

WEST SEATTLE/WHITE CENTER

Dubsea Coffee

Dubsea coffee is as much a community gathering space as it is a hidden gem serving velvety hand-pulled espresso drinks made with small-batch Counter Culture Coffee (or occasionally, when the stars align, Stumptown). It's a family-friendly place perfect for meeting friends or having a productive workday, and the amazing staff really take the time to get to know their customers and ensure first-timers feel at home. Make sure you come hungry—they have all Seattle's best pastries under one roof including Macrina, Mighty-O Donuts, and Molly's sandwiches and salads. Now serving gluten-free and vegan snacks, too.

KARA TIERNAN

Cortona Cafe



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RARE



ELIZABETH CROOK

Jewish Delis, Bagels, and Israeli Cuisine

Hope springs eternal for Seattle's Jewish food scene.

BY NAOMI TOMKY

Once upon a time, Brenner Brothers Bakery churned out traditional Ashkenazi (Eastern European Jewish) breads in the heavily Jewish neighborhood of the Central District, and Sephardic Jews (those with Spanish-Jewish ancestors) manned the stands of Pike Place Market—which boasted lunch spots like the Cozy Corner to serve them.

Today, Seattle's Jewish community plays an undersized role in the city's culinary scene. Food traditionally thought of as Jewish in America—the bagels, lox, and pastrami sandwiches specific to New York Jewry—arises more often in discussions of what Seattle lacks than in celebration of the food scene.

Even as Seattle's Jewish population has skyrocketed since the

turn of the millennium, restaurants and cafes serving markedly Jewish food have struggled: Matzoh Momma disappeared before the rush began, Leah's Bakery and Cafe turned its focus to catering in 2008, and Stopsky's Delicatessen pivoted to pickles in 2014. By 2015, when a Brandeis University study noted the 70 percent increase in Seattle's Jewish population, Jews made up 5 percent of Seattle's population—more than twice the percentage of Vietnamese people in town. Yet, while pho flourished, the only options for matzo-ball soup were mediocre mall versions. Seattle's only true, full-service, sit-down kosher restaurant is a vegetarian Indian restaurant in the suburbs.

But hope abounds among fans of bourekas, pastrami, and gefilte fish (yes, we exist). A pastrami

start-up, a bagel window, and a kosher meat food truck have all opened recently, carefully taking baby steps into Seattle's edible landscape. And not one but two Jewish delis, both run by well-established local culinary professionals, plan to be open by the end of the year.

When Eltana opened its doors at the end of 2010, the wood-fired bagel shop ran into resistance from New York bagel purists. Its small, vaguely Montreal-style bagels failed to satisfy East Coast transplants chasing the chewy, blistered rings of memory.

Enter **Westman's Bagel and Coffee**. Opened by Monica Dimas—of Neon Taco, Tortas Condesa, and Sunset Fried Chicken Sandwiches—and baker Molly Westman, it takes its cues from the traditional New York

bagel shop both in its singular focus on bagels and in its style of bagel: hand-rolled and freshly baked. Plump but not oversized, amply schmearred with the house-made cream cheese (from local dairy, natch), the bagels live up to the exemplars of the East Coast—though not without the option for a few original flourishes such as Maldon salt sprinkles and caviar schmear.

The tiny walk-up window evokes the street-side stands of the New York roots of this style of bagel, and the presence of a decidedly non-Jewish Big Apple favorite—the bacon, egg, and cheese sandwich on a soft roll—cements it. Seattleites finally have their New York bagel shop. The only question that remains is if the long lines and overwhelming fandom that greeted it can



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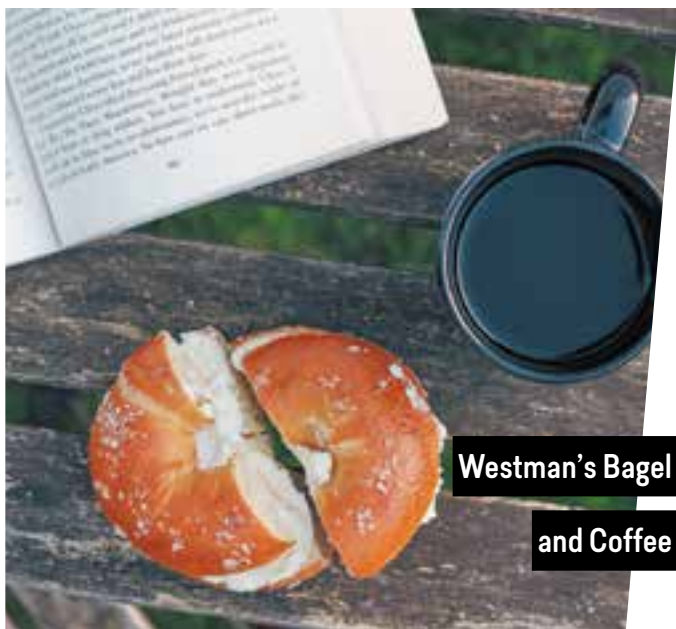
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keep it in business—and maybe even encourage more of its ilk.

David Youssefnia chose to start small with his pastrami business: **Pastrome** began as a backyard hobby for the New York transplant, but the entrepreneur quickly saw an opportunity. Using his start-up expertise, he slowly built up a rabid fan base through catering, private events, and custom orders.

His slow-growth business plan matches the long process of making pastrami—it gets brined, rubbed, smoked, and steamed before it even sees a glimpse of mustard or rye bread—and gives him some protection against the constant fluctuation of the daily restaurant business. It makes it a bit harder for the public to get their hands on the highest quality Jewish deli meat in the Pacific Northwest, but it's that insurance against cost overruns that allows the perfect pastrami to exist in the first place. Pastrome's periodic pop-ups give newcomers a chance to taste his meat, but committed carnivores subscribe to the monthly meat club, which drops off in South Lake Union.

Finding Seattle's only kosher-certified meat requires similar effort. **KoGo**, a kosher food truck that also specializes

in pastrami, hopes to one day set up shop on a regular basis, but it is currently selling its meat and cured fish only via online ordering until further notice.

But while Americans traditionally think of Jewish food as this particular brand of Eastern European cuisine filtered through the Lower East Side in the early 20th century, **Eggs and Plants** (Belltown) and **Aviv Hummus**

Seattleites finally have their New York bagel shop.

Bar (Capitol Hill) offer a different version: that of Israel. Israel, as a melting pot of Jews from around the world, doesn't really have its own cuisine, but instead highlights the foods brought there by immigrants. Which is why the star sandwich at Eggs and Plants—a small cafe tucked in next door to a glass-blowing studio—is actually of Iraqi heritage. Sabich, a stuffed pita that resembles a salad bar gone beautifully awry, piles fried eggplant with eggs, hummus, a salad of cucumbers and tomatoes, another of cabbage, and pickles, before it suc-

cumbs to a dousing of tahini. Other dishes include a Yemeni flatbread, a Persian omelet, and falafel (the cafe notes its Egyptian lineage). What brings them all together is the shared history of migration from home countries, each brought by Jews of different national origins, to Israel.

Falafel shows up on the menu of Aviv, as well—one of few dishes served there besides the namesake dip. Restaurants around the city sell hummus and falafel, staples of the entire the Middle East, but Aviv's singular focus on these twin pillars of chickpea-based greatness—and making them fresh to order—transforms each into a revelation. Aviv's hummus leaves behind the clumpy, thick memories of grocery store tubs, instead providing diners with fluffy, warm pita to swipe directly through the airy, fresh dip. Like the difference between the classic American taco-night specimen, with a hard shell, shredded cheddar, and iceberg lettuce, and a made-to-order street taco fresh off the grill, the hummus most Americans know (and some even love) shares only a name and a loose strand of DNA with what Aviv produces.

That revolutionary look at how we think of various food of Jewish origins is what Seattleites hope to see from a few impending newcomers, too. Toward the end of the year (or, perhaps, in early 2019), the folks behind latke sandwich truck Napkin Friends will open the Frelard doors of **Schmaltzy's Delicatessen**. But nobody need wait that long: Come this summer, the owners of Nourish Catering plan to open **Dingfelder's Delicatessen** on Pine Street and 13th Avenue, featuring sweet and savory kugels, babkas, knishes, and black and white cookies, along with their signature pastrami sandwiches.

As this trend solidifies, Jews and Jewish food fans should be sated. But we're probably not getting kishka anytime soon. ■



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JENNIFER RICHARD

Vietnamese Cuisine

A guide to the must-try Vietnamese restaurants found amid Seattle's plentitude.

BY KARA TIERNAN

If you've ever had a craving for a steamy bowl of pho or juicy bánh mì, you know Seattle has no shortage of good Vietnamese restaurants scattered across the city. Here's our breakdown of local favorites hidden in Little Saigon and beyond.

Tamarind Tree

Tamarind Tree is tucked away in the Asian Plaza strip mall in Little Saigon, a two-block hot spot for all things Vietnamese in the heart of the International District. It's received rave reviews since opening in 2004, thanks to its sleek modern decor, inviting atmosphere, and attention to detail in each and every dish. The menu features shareable traditional dishes with a fresh twist, like the green mango salad with grilled lemongrass tofu, spicy chili lemongrass chicken,

and Tamarind Tree rolls served with a sweet and spicy dipping sauce. They have a lovely covered patio that's open year-round, so you can cozy up under heat lamps in winter and fall, or order a fun cocktail and soak in the sun during the spring and summertime.

Vietnam House

Next door to Tamarind Tree is a more casual, family-friendly spot that's serving up some of the best authentic, no-fuss Vietnamese cuisine in the

city. It's covered in wall-to-wall faux brick wallpaper, and large groups of young and old diners sit around slurping bowls of rich bún bò huê (the other popular Vietnamese soup you need to know about). There's so much more to Vietnamese cuisine beyond pho, and you'll find a lot of the favorites here, like bánh xèo, crispy Vietnamese pork and shrimp pancakes, and endless rice plate combos like cơm tấm đặc biệt with grilled pork chops, deep-fried bean curd, and egg. Let your kind server



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Saigon Deli



ELIZABETH CROOK

guide you through the menu and order you a Heineken that’s served warm over a glass of ice, no questions asked.

Pho Bac Súp Shop

Pho Bac, known to many as Seattle’s first pho restaurant, has been serving pho out of that big red wooden boat on the corner of Rainier and Jackson since 1982. It’s safe to say the Pham family knows pho—so when their kids opened Pho Bac Súp Shop in the same lot earlier this year, you knew it would draw a following. Everything, from the neon signage to the drink list featuring bourbon with pho aromatics (a MUST!), pays tribute to the family’s roots through a modern, hipster lens. The pho is obviously great—but the standouts are really on the bites menu, which features twice-fried chicken wings with sweet and tangy tamarind sauce, spicy pork sliders, fries with lemongrass sauce, and so much more!

Saigon Deli

When you can get a delicious bánh mì in the city for less than \$4—you order two. And you won’t regret it! People line up at this little counter deli for good reason—the pork is perfectly seasoned

and the French bread is crispy on the outside yet fluffy on the inside, plus it comes loaded with all the right veggies and extra cilantro. You could opt to order your sandwich with ham, chicken, or tofu instead—but why mess with a good thing? These are utter perfection, and a great snack to grab before you head off on a hike or take on a picnic in Hing Hay Park. There are no seats here, so plan ahead for a grab-and-go meal, or plant yourself on the curb out front.

Green Leaf

It took me a while to try Green Leaf, but I’m so glad I did. The hole-in-the-wall original Chinatown location (with other locations in Belltown and Bellevue) is kitty-corner from the Wing Luke Museum, and definitely provides the fastest service on the list if you’re in a pinch and want to get in and out on your lunch hour, or just in record time. The veggie pho overflows with Chinese broccoli, bok choy, carrots, and tofu, and the broth is as rich and aromatic as any brisket or pork pho I’ve ever tasted. They have a number of vermicelli combos that look delicious, as well as goi salads, congee, and udon noodles tossed with shrimp

and crab or pork. Go here for an intimate date night or quick dinner before you sing your karaoke heart out at Bush Garden.

Pho 99 Vietnamese Noodle House

This unassuming spot in a White Center strip mall is serving up some of the best (if not *the* best!) pho in the city. The difference between good and great pho is all about the broth, which here is consistently light yet subtly rich and complex in flavor. Taste it before you start dumping in the plum sauce and red pepper flakes—you won't need as much as you think. I've been ordering the brisket pho to cure lingering colds or afternoon hangovers for more than 17 years, and it always hits the spot. They're graciously heavy-handed with their toppings, too (piles of bean sprouts, cilantro, and jalapeños for everyone!). Order the iced Viet coffee with condensed milk for a decadent caffeine fix, and don't miss the spring rolls with peanut sauce, the tangy barbecue chicken, or the prawn skewers.

Ba Bar

Ba Bar is your go-to restaurant for consistently fantastic Vietnamese in Seattle—and you can have it morning, noon, and night. They now have three locations (Capitol Hill, SLU, and U-Village) where you can get fluffy croissants, pastries, and macaroons in the morning, and pho served several ways, inventive bowls of vermicelli noodles with pork belly, or Washington-coast-caught rockfish in the afternoon and evening. Come here for specialties like bánh cuốn—handmade rice sheets with Carlton Farms pork belly served Hanoi or Sài Gòn style—and linger for the late-night happy hour and craft cocktails like the Nguyen Dynasty, a gin drink with rhubarb syrup, fresh-squeezed lemon juice, and extra bubbly.

Hue Ky Mi Gia

Purists take note: This is technically a Chinese noodle house, serving both Vietnamese and Chinese cuisine, but get over it—this OG restaurant came to fruition in Saigon, and their noodle dishes will have you professing love at first bite. With locations in the International District, Kent, Tacoma, and now Century Link Field, South Enders will

be hard-pressed to find fresher noodles around the city. They serve three types of noodles piled high—egg, rice, and vermicelli—either in broth or dry with familiar proteins like chicken or barbecue pork, or the more inventive five-spice braised duck or spare ribs. People travel far and wide for the fried butter garlic chicken wings—a perfect starter when paired with prawn or squid chow mein, or chow fun, a delightful Cantonese wide-rice noodle dish.

Pho Hai Yen

Pho Hai Yen sits on the outskirts of the International District, on Rainier Avenue, several blocks away from the bustle of Jackson Street. You've probably driven right past it on your way into the city. It's worth a pit stop next time for the giant pork and shrimp spring rolls, or for the bún bò huê—which comes in 10 different varieties, including four pork options. Order the No. 23 bún bò huê that comes with tender beef, pork meatballs, and pork blood cake—it packs a lot of unexpected heat and will give you street cred with the owners. Cool down with a chè trai vai, a sweet and subtly tart lychee beverage—or, if you're feeling adventurous, the nước rau má, a pennywort drink that's been a popular vegetable juice in Vietnamese cuisine long before cold-pressed kale was a thing.

Wicked Chopstix

Rainier Valley is a melting pot of Mexican, Ethiopian, Laotian, Senegalese, and a ton of other great restaurants—a good representation of the community that lives there. When residents want Vietnamese, they head to the relatively new Wicked Chopstix, which gained notoriety after putting the Bun Cha Obama (also known as the Obama noodle) on the menu. Named after the dish former President Obama and Anthony Bourdain shared on an episode of *Parts Unknown*, it features crispy pork swimming in a fish sauce broth with vermicelli noodles, egg rolls, and an array of veggies to build your own lettuce wraps or soup. Beyond the standard brisket and pork pho you often see, they also serve up pho with lobster claw, oxtail, and tenderloin steak that are top-notch.



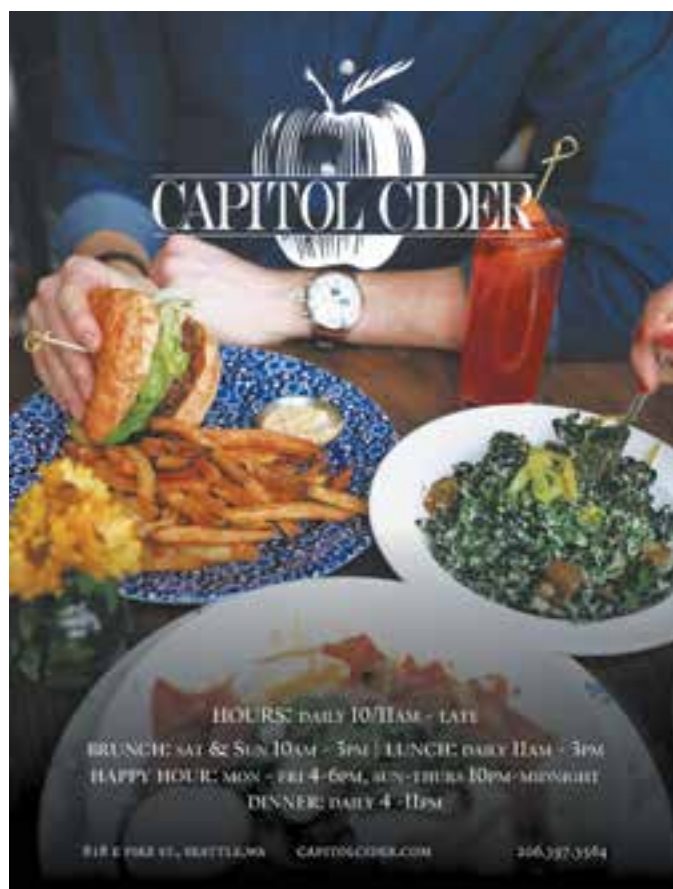


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BY LEILANI POLK

If you are gluten free for health reasons (and not because you're following a fad, which you're about four years late on), I imagine you are much like me: relentlessly searching for a sense of dining normalcy after cutting out an essential component of your diet.

Capitol Cider has an entirely GF menu that jells nicely with its naturally gluten-free ciders, and its offerings are epically delicious. For lunch, try the perfectly crispy buttermilk fried chicken sandwich and a cup of rich and creamy cod chowder topped with a zesty horseradish gremolata. The dinner-time menu includes dishes GFers generally don't get to eat, like fish and chips, but I am addicted to the braised pork shoulder, its tender and flavorful meat complemented by earthy-sweet beet relish and perfectly velvety white grits.

Niche Gluten Free Bakery & Cafe also has the distinction of featuring a fully GF menu. The breakfast and lunch joint's specialties are house-made waffles and focaccia for sandwiches (the Nutella and banana waffle is *everything*, while the club sandwich pairs turkey with thick cut candied bacon).

If you share my heavy-duty sweet tooth, there are three excellent Seattle area bakeries that peddle GF goodies. **Nuflours** is Capitol Hill's GF and vegan standard, and they've got impressive

volume and variety—cinnamon buns soaked in a thick caramel glaze, éclairs you've been missing since you quit wheat, bread loaves, cookies, and cakes (I took home a decadent cheesecake for

virtually everything on its regular menu, all baked using their slightly sweet and chewy trademark GF dough. Central District's **Central Pizza** also has a good pie; its texture is on point (read: tastes like



BENJAMIN BLACKKETTER

Christmas dinner). The heavenly confections at **Flying Apron** in Fremont and Redmond include delicious approximations of cake doughnuts with ever-changing flavors; my last visit yielded one with raspberry glaze and another coated in chocolate and dusted with coconut. Finally, there's **Cinnamon Works**, a staple of Pike Place Market with a generous selection of GF provisions (get the moist, monster GF cookie, you'll eat it over a few days).

Finally, pizza. Great GF pizza is hard to find, but **Razzis Pizzeria** (with locations in downtown and Greenwood) offers GF options of

the "real" thing), and the crust is perfectly crunchy.

Some quick hits: **HoneyHole** has amazing sandwiches you can get on Olivia Superfree GF baguettes, **Oddfellows Cafe** has choice GF treats (I get their GF biscuits with jam), **Cupcake Royale** has incredible GF cupcakes (chocolate with salted caramel icing is the best), and while I haven't been to **Ghostfish Brewing Company** because I don't drink beer, all of their small-batch beers are gluten-free.

Now, fellow wheat-intolerant or wheat-sensitive friends, venture forth and eat up! ■

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Seafood Restaurants

We've waded through the chum to bring you the most noteworthy of Seattle's overabundant seafood offerings.

BY JULIANNE BELL

There's no shortage of seafood eateries in Seattle. Our proximity to Puget Sound means that we've got a constant supply of *fruits de mer* gracing our tables—lucky us! But sometimes those seafood restaurants are more about the dazzling waterfront view than, you know, the food. We've rounded up places with the freshest catches, our favorites ranging from cheap to swanky.



SARAH FLOTARD

Bar Melusine

This Renee Erickson seafood and oyster bar inspired by the French Atlantic coast is decked out in kicky nautical decor, its bright white aesthetic accented by sea-green chairs lined up around the counter. A daily rotating selection of fresh oysters on ice sits in baskets atop the curved marble bar, where you can perch and slurp briny Hama Hamas and Blue Pools topped with a refreshing, verdant cucumber mignonette. On the menu: cocktails, wine, and seafood-centric small plates like fried oysters with vadouvan aioli. Don't miss the fried fish skin, a kind of crispy, crackly, eminently snackable chicharrón-of-the-sea dotted with crème fraîche and punctuated by salty bursts of fish roe and shavings of radish.

Emerald City Fish & Chips

In a video from BuzzFeed's "Worth It" series, two testers set out to try salmon from three different restaurants in Seattle at varying price points. They found that the \$8.50 meal from this humble Rainier Valley fish-and-chips shop had the best value compared to much spendier dishes at Ivar's Salmon House and AQUA by El Gaucho. What makes Emerald City Fish & Chips so good? Owner Steve Allen, a Seattle native whose family hails from New Orleans, dredges the fish in a gluten-free corn-flour breading before it hits the fryer to create a thin, crispy, chewy golden coat that lets the vibrant pink wild Alaskan salmon shine through. Thoughtful details like rémoulade and

tartar sauce (fresh and slightly spicy) prepared fresh on site and fries with Cajun-style seasoning set it apart from the rest. Other dishes of note: the "crab puppies," house-made gumbo every Monday and Tuesday, and an unmissable smoked-salmon chowder.

L'Oursin

The wine menu at L'Oursin—a lively seafood-focused French restaurant in the Central District—is so good, you'll want to stuff one in your purse. Featuring funky, offbeat biodynamic natural wines, it cites such evocative, abstract flavor descriptions as "soft wool and winter kisses, peach pits and hippie tits" and "has amazing posture, is very loud and will kiss you right on the lips." That same sparkling, irreverent *joie de*

vivre suffuses every square inch of the space, which is dim and imbued with a faint golden glow from the pendant lighting at the bar. A crudo plate I tried knit together the exquisite saltiness of albacore tuna, capers, preserved lemon, and radishes to brilliant effect. The San Juan pink scallops were sweet, plump, and swoon-worthy, and an order of crusty house-made bread sopped up the broth perfectly. This is a funny valentine of a restaurant, equal parts witty and romantic.

Manolin

The crew at this beachy Fremont restaurant is composed of former employees from Renee Erickson's Walrus and the Carpenter, and her fairy-godmother influence certainly twinkles in



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The Walrus and the Carpenter



JIM HENKINS

the locally sourced, seafood-centric small plates and wood-fired grill. But Manolin is something all its own: sensual, artfully plated, Caribbean-slanted dishes. Snag a spot near the cozy fire pit and get an order of plantain chips to snack on. Definitely try the rockfish ceviche—the sweet, fresh rockfish with buttery avocado cubes and bright pickled onions is doused in tart, refreshing lime vinaigrette and topped with a crunchy cluster of deep-fried sweet-potato strings. Other standouts include the black cod with mole and the smoked arctic char.

Taylor Shellfish Farms Oyster Bar

“Tide-to-table” retailer Taylor Shellfish has been in the seafood game for five generations, and the offerings at all four of their oyster bars are sourced directly from their own oyster farms daily, so you know they’re going to be fresh. Sit at the bar and sip a glass of something crisp and sparkling while you gulp down oysters with lemon and champagne mignonette, and eavesdrop on conversations around you. Some of the oysters, like their popular “Fat Bastard,” are tide-tumbled—a technique yielding an oyster with a deep cup, more meat, and a smooth, polished shell—at Hamish Bay, while others were beach-grown at various oyster farms. Taylor’s resident shuckers are affable and game to explain the finer points of the bivalves of the day to you.

The Walrus and the Carpenter

The wait at this acclaimed Renee Erickson oyster bar in Ballard, which doesn’t accept reservations, is famously long, and rightfully so. To kill time and prepare your belly for all the bivalves you’re about to slide down your gullet, go sip an aperitivo made with one of the many amaros from the bar’s extensive collection at Erickson’s Barnacle next door. Once you’re back, get ready to glut yourself on a parade of chubby, buttery oysters from Hama Hama and other local suppliers, along with frites and sourdough bread from the excellent local Sea Wolf Bakery. Cap it all off with an order of salty roasted medjool dates for dessert.

Westward

Helmed by Joshua Henderson of Skillet, this waterfront restaurant is a little bit Northwest, a little bit Jacques Cousteau, with its nautical decor inspired in part by *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou*, and has an outdoor area featuring Adirondack chairs for lounging around an oyster-shell fire pit. There are fresh oysters on the half shell, small plates like steamed Manila clams and grilled octopus salad, larger plates like roasted arctic char, and veggie sides. Menu offerings change often depending on seasonal availability, but the wood oven roasted rainbow trout—grilled whole and deboned tableside—is a highlight, tender and rich with clean, sweet brown butter and romanesco.

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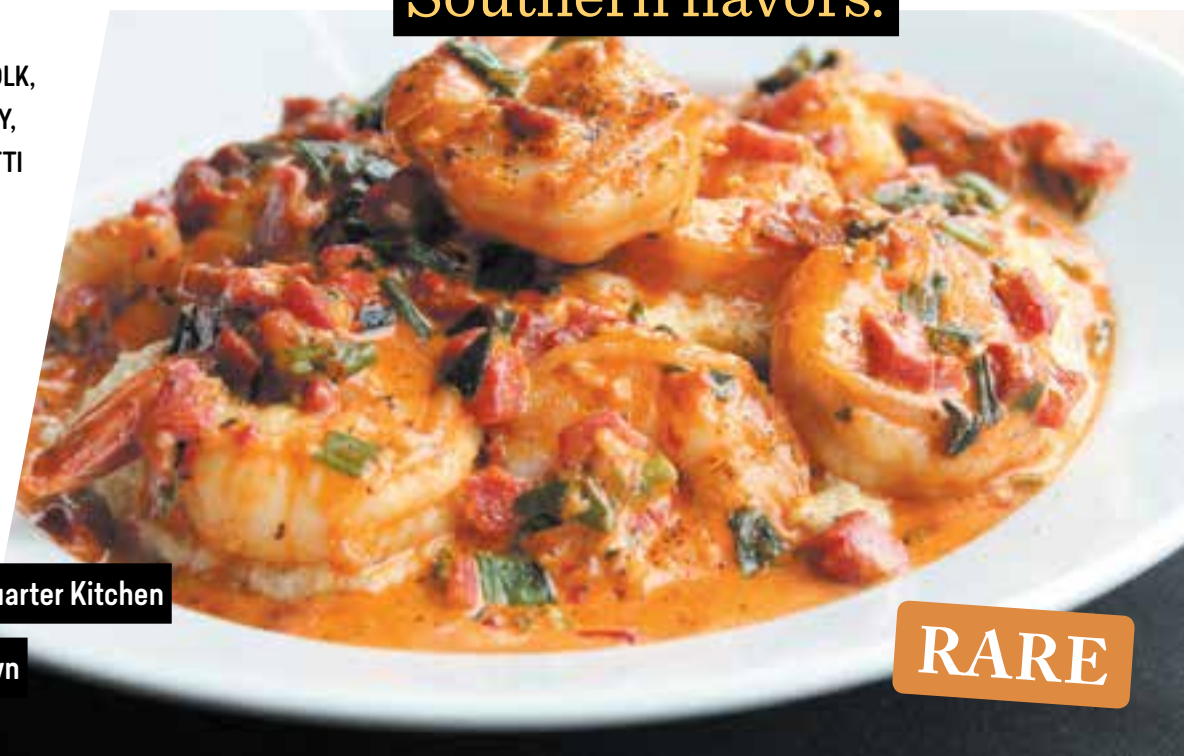
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BY LEILANI POLK,
NAOMI TOMKY,
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French Quarter Kitchen

in Belltown

RARE

SCHATZIE MILLER

If you come from sunny southern climes, you've probably been searching for restaurants that offer a taste of home. Or maybe you aren't from the South at all, but you do want to enjoy some authentic flavor. Here's our picks for the best places to satisfy your hankering for down-home cooking.

JuneBaby

Even if Seattle were blessed with a wealth of Southern food, Edouardo Jordan's Ravenna spot would stand out. Jordan gives Seattle the Southern food it thinks it wants—pimento cheese and buttermilk biscuits—while peppering his menu with gems rarely served at a restaurant with \$13 cocktails, like hog maw stew and crispy pig ear. The menu cooks each dish into a story, describing Jordan's personal journey from St. Petersburg, Florida, to fine dining in New York City, and on to Seattle's neighborhood restaurant scene. From the pickle-lined walls to Jordan's own smile beaming out of

the kitchen's peekaboo window, the warmth of the restaurant invites diners to kindly abandon stereotypes of Southern food and step into Jordan's world of smoked chili vinaigrette and charred okra. **NAOMI TOMKY**

French Quarter Kitchen

French Quarter Kitchen is located in Belltown, is run by three women (chef, general manager, and bar manager), and was formerly known as Absinthe Brasserie. They still serve 16 varieties of that highly alcoholic beverage, and several of the restaurant's specialty cocktails make drinking it a pleasure. The Amuse Vert is a mix of absinthe,


lime, mint, and pineapple that is vaguely reminiscent of a mojito, but with more subtle layers of flavor that end with refreshing mint notes. But the real focus is the food. Among the menu highlights are the fried green tomatoes and fried catfish, both crispy-delicious and cornmeal-battered for those practicing a gluten-free lifestyle, and shrimp and grits, the house creole sauce velvety and rich with just the right amount of spicy kick to complement creamy stone-ground grits. **LEILANI POLK**

Jack's BBQ

Jack's feels like an authentic Texas-style barbecue restaurant, from the long

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community tables to the staff's congenial Southern hospitality. The metal serving trays are big and festooned with pieces of white bread. The meat dishes are plentiful, smoked and flavorful (try the jalapeño-stuffed sausage links). The creamy mac and cheese and Jack's meaty house chili will transport you to a Dallas mess hall teeming with cowboy hats and jangly boots, but the standout has to be Jack's rib tips. Juicy, smoked, and charred to perfection, they are the perfect bite-size snack. **JAKE UITTI**

Drunky's Two Shoe BBQ

Walking through the charming saloon-style restaurants (with locations in Frelard and White Center) like a contemporary cow-person, it's easy to lust after the smoked chicken, beef brisket, or sausage links on plates passing you by. Drunky's broad menu—which is decidedly Texas-inspired, save for the Saint Louis-style pork ribs—is both expansive and enticing. If you order nothing else, however, make it Drunky's collard greens. Packed with a deep, dark umami flavor, the pork-rich dish has a caramelized, almost French-onion-soup appeal. Drunky's \$20 plate of ribs are thick and toothsome, the meat sliding easily off the bone and pairing deliciously with Drunky's house-made table hot sauce. **JAKE UITTI**

Wandering Goose

One look at the giant cakes by the register at this Capitol Hill eatery—whose menu is informed by the flavors of North Carolina—and you know what you're in store for: heaping portions. Our favorite offering is the Sawmill, a big biscuit stuffed with an even bigger piece of perfectly fried chicken, all of it swimming in a pool of spicy sausage gravy. For dessert, the hand-smashed, glazed cinnamon roll is rather memorable—they make it with biscuit dough, which gives a bit more heft to the traditional pastry—and the seemingly 35-story red velvet cake is unforgettable, as delectable as it is decadent. **JAKE UITTI**

Toulouse Petit

Seattle's other noteworthy Cajun-Creole restaurant has a more extensive menu than what you find at French Quarter Kitchen, minus the absinthe, and plenty of what you find on it is delicious (try

the jambalaya). But their breakfast and brunch is where it's at: pork cheeks confit hash (which was featured on the Food Network show *The Best Thing I Ever Ate*), the Bayou Fisherman's Breakfast (shrimp, fish, crawfish, and tasso, served in a mini-skillet with grits and a fried egg on top), and Cajun meatloaf and eggs are just a few of the savory options. Plus, you can get the same menu, with discounts, during the weekday breakfast happy hour, from 9 to 11 a.m. After dark is also a fine time to visit—the candles placed on the walls all around the room are lit, filling the place with a dreamy, flickering orange glow. **LEILANI POLK**

Fat's Chicken & Waffles

A New Orleans-influenced Southern food gem in the heart of the Central District, Fat's has some of our favorite on-the-

balance that's both professional and warmly familial, much to the pleasure of smiling patrons. You can't go wrong with anything on the menu here, so I'd suggest starting with a sampler plate. We ordered the absolutely divine candied yams, the flavorful red beans and rice, the savory black-eyed peas, the melt-in-your-mouth grits, and the bountiful biscuit sandwich with Andouille sausage. The star of the show was most certainly the candied yams, but the supporting cast for the meal was award-worthy, as well. **JAKE UITTI**

RoRo BBQ & Grill

Though it doesn't have traditional Southern roots—RoRo owner Rob Carson is from Seattle, and got into smoking meats while living in California—this cozy place evokes that down-home feeling with its small yet cozy interior, all light woods and barn-red



JuneBaby

JONATHANVANDERWEIT

bone fried chicken—you can get a pair of drumsticks for a mere \$5—but there are also plenty of other standouts: the savory-sweet sausage links, absolutely divine red beans and rice, toasted corn bread, and crispy fried okra. Get all of it together, and you'll be sure to have nothing but cleaned plates at the end of your meal. **JAKE UITTI**

Simply Soulful

You might be surprised to find an amazing soul food restaurant tucked away in Madison Valley, but Simply Soulful is there to defy your expectations. The staff works within a delicate, welcoming

gingham with matching accents. The menu skews heavy to giant sandwiches featuring RoRo's smoked offerings—beef brisket and tri-tip, pulled pork and chicken, portobello, hot links. You can top of any of these with coleslaw or “spike” your sandwich with bacon or a hot link. Pork ribs and chicken thighs are also offered, as entrées with two sides, and all the meats can be purchased by the pound (outside the sammies). The sides include bright, crunchy Seattle succotash (sans lima beans, plus black beans, edamame, red onion, red pepper, and cilantro in a lime vinaigrette) and perfectly sweet barbecue baked beans. **LEILANI POLK**



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BY LESTER BLACK

Seattle is one of the greatest places on earth to be a beer drinker. We have an insane number of breweries producing high-quality beers, thanks in large part to our city's lengthy craft-beer history and our brewers' access to incredible local ingredients.

There are more than 60 breweries within Seattle city limits, including a few that people across the country view as world-class. Our metropolitan area has more than 170 breweries, which, at last count, was the most of any metro area in the country. Mix in our town's incredible beer bars and you'll find that there is entirely too much good beer to be had.

That's where I come in.

I've tasted my way across Seattle's tap lists to find the breweries and bars that any self-respecting beer drinker should visit. There are more worthwhile spots than I can fit on this list, but drinking your way through the ones included here will give you a crash course in what Seattle's beer scene has to offer.

WELL
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Holy Mountain Brewing

in Interbay



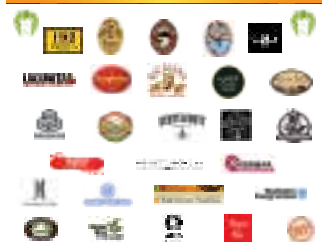
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TeKu Tavern

JESSICA STEIN

Holy Mountain Brewing

Some breweries focus on a certain style, like Machine House in Georgetown, which only makes English cask ales, or Floodland Brewery in Fremont, which produces barrel-aged wild beers. But at Interbay's Holy Mountain Brewing, the only thing all their beers have in common is that they are absolutely fucking fantastic. You can find Holy Mountain on tap around town, but the best place to try the gamut of their beers is their taproom.

I suggest starting with something low in alcohol. Holy Mountain's brewers handle sub-4-percent beers with deftness—take their Servant's Table, a light Belgian pale ale that is a perfect balance of lemon zest, light-toasted biscuits, and mellow tang.

Next, order something wild and acidic. The brewers here are masters at coercing farmhouse flavors out of wild yeasts to create deeply nuanced beers.

Finish with something hugely alcoholic, dark, and barrel-aged. Holy Mountain has a way of brewing decadently rich beers that are over 10 percent alcohol, but are so balanced you can accidentally chug them like a Rainier.

Reuben's Brews

Drinking beer in Ballard is a formulaic process. It basically involves nursing IPAs in cold warehouses while fighting with babies and dogs for a place to sit. It's a redundant formula, but when the IPAs are good, all of those babies suddenly seem worth it. And the hoppy beers at Reuben's are not only good, they're prestigiously good.

Since opening six years ago, Reuben's has won dozens of national

and international awards for their beers, including three gold medals in the last three years at North America's premier beer competition, the Great American Beer Festival. This year's gold-medal winner was Reuben's Triumvirate IPA, which is fruit-forward, crisp, light, and all about the hops. With its clear body, Triumvirate is Seattle's middle finger to the beer nerds of New England who demand their fruity IPAs be as murky as Boston's Charles River.

Outlander Brewery & Pub

Outlander Brewery & Pub in downtown Fremont is located in a three-story house that has been lightly converted into a brewery and pub with a spacious deck and back patio. I say "lightly" because the space still very much resembles a home, complete with upstairs bedrooms where drinkers can play video games and plug spare aux cables into their phones to DJ their own party.

And the beer made in Outlander's basement is usually great and always interesting. Don't miss the refreshing Holy Basil Pale Ale. It's made with tulsi, a medicinal form of basil from India that gives it a very light clove and herbal flavor.

Beveridge Place Pub

I know West Seattle is horribly far away from everything other than West Seattle, but don't wait 40 years for light rail to reach over there to enjoy the offerings of Beveridge Place Pub. Its taproom has been regularly featured in national news outlets as one of the best in America—and it's worthy of all the hype.

Beveridge Place Pub has an impeccably curated tap list—ordering a beer here

almost always involves some difficult decisions—and the pub itself is one of the more comfortable places to drink excellent beer in this city. Cozy couches that somehow avoid smelling like they've been dipped in beer for a decade join a scattering of tables that can easily accommodate large groups.

This California Avenue pub also seems to host a beer festival nearly every week—another reason to make the trip across Elliott Bay to the lower left side of our city.

Chuck's Hop Shop

One does not go to Chuck's Hop Shop for the ambience. Both locations of Chuck Shin's Seattle beer empire are crammed with incredible amounts of beer and lack any sort of interior design. The Greenwood location still very much resembles the convenience store it once was, and "cafeteria-like" is a generous description of the Central District location.

One goes to Chuck's for the tap list, which is so deep that it must be displayed across multiple big-screen TVs, and includes an exhaustive spread of local beers plus a splattering of hard-to-find imports. And the refrigerators and shelves lined with bottles are among the best places to find packaged beer in the city.

Chuck does a good job of keeping high-quality food trucks at both of his locations as well, meaning you can drink your way through a dozen Seattle-brewed beers while eating tasty, affordable food.

Stumbling Monk

There's a lot of irony in how Americans consume Belgian beer. In their native land, many of the most vaunted Belgian beers are produced either by monks who have taken vows of poverty or by fairly plebian brewers who, up until this decade, were frequently bankrupt and poor. In America, we elevate the price and status of these beers to the point of exclusivity and reserve them for the rich.

Stumbling Monk on Capitol Hill's Olive Way cuts through the bullshit, serving classic sour and wild beers at fair price points in a bar that would make even a farmer feel at ease, while

the creaky benches and dilapidated refrigerators give it the feel of a communist meeting hall in Brussels. Try the Duchesse De Bourgogne, a red ale with a wonderful mix of sweet, tart, and savory flavors, like a balsamic reduction mixed with sweet cherries. Drink up, comrade.

TeKu Tavern

TeKu Tavern is named after a type of beer glass that was designed to perfectly deliver a beer's aromas and flavor; the South Lake Union taproom takes this dedication to precise functionality to heart. The bar claims to clean its tap lines every time they change a keg (most bars in Seattle probably clean their lines once a month, if that), and they take a lot of care in how they serve and educate customers about their beers.

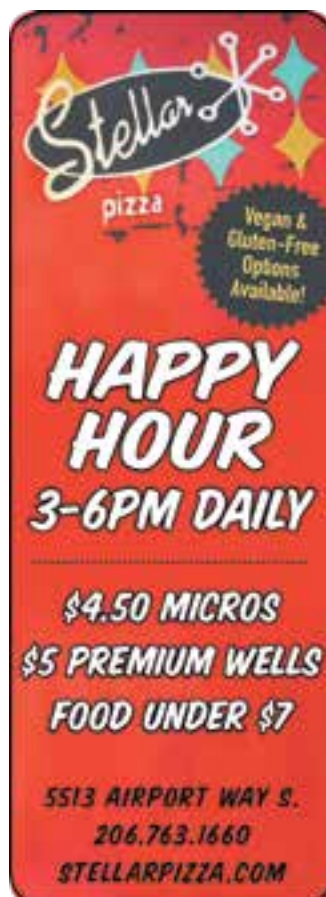
The ethos at TeKu can feel overwrought, especially if you're new to the world of quality beer, but it fits in well amongst its techie neighbors—and the 50 beers on tap are consistently fantastic. The bar's long, communal tables also get busy with people who are serious about their beer, which makes it a fun place to geek out about what's in your glass.

The Masonry

The Masonry might be Seattle's coolest beer spot. On a recent visit, the bar was lined with beautiful people who were dressed well and drinking interesting beer while a vinyl record played in the background. The original location in Lower Queen Anne is an intimate space off Roy Street with graffiti art on the walls and built around a wood-fired pizza oven, while the Fremont location is an expansive light-filled space with a long bar and plenty of seating. Both have impressive beer lists.

The Masonry is the type of place where you can throw a dart at the beer menu and still end up with an amazing beer. Their ability to get kegs from some of the most sought-after breweries in the Pacific Northwest—and the world—is seriously impressive, with frequent pours from breweries like De Garde, E9, Cantillon, Jolly Pumpkin, and Jester King.

They serve good pizza and food as well, somewhat of a rarity in Seattle's best taprooms.



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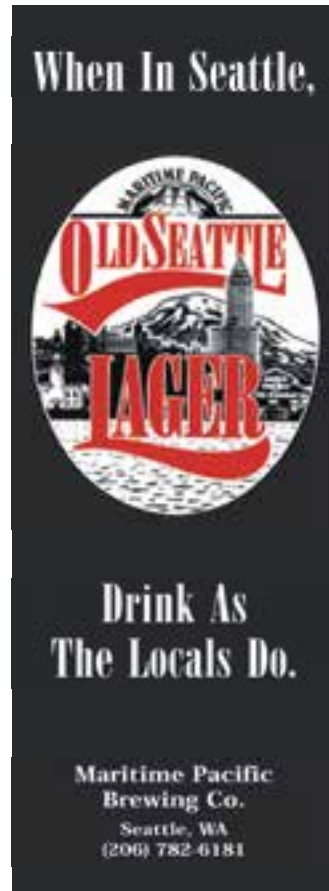
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KELLY O

Thai Food

Our favorite purveyors of Thai cuisine.

BY JULIANNE BELL

In a city where Thai food is more popular than pizza, you can't swing a dead cat without hitting a purveyor of pad thai. But many places present anodyne, Americanized versions of Thai cuisine for the unadventurous palate. Here we've rounded up the unique Seattle gems distinct enough to stand out in a sea of pad see ew—the restaurants that specialize in the bold, funky flavors of authentic Northern Thai street food, the restaurants that don't succumb to “vanity spicing” (meaning they're not kidding around when you ask for five stars), and the ones that branch out with special dishes you won't find elsewhere.

Buddha Ruksa

Buddha Ruksa, you will be informed by a number of framed press clippings as you walk in the door, has a specialty, and that is its famous crack chicken (well, technically the menu has it as “crispy garlic chicken,” but that's not what its legion of devoted fans call it). It's a sticky-sweet, smoky, crunchy, battered-and-glazed chicken dish laced with red chilies and shatteringly crisp fried basil leaves, and it's inspired a myriad of online threads with curious folks speculating as to what they put in it to make it so damn habit-forming. Is it tamarind? Fish sauce? The world may never know. Though the crack chicken is the clear standout, the rest of the food here is also solid.

Little Uncle

Chefs Wiley Frank and Poncharee Kounpungchart originally started Little Uncle as a walk-up counter (in the space that is now home to Westman's Bagel and Coffee). Now it's a bright, clean, no-frills sit-down restaurant just down the street, its lack of bells and whistles bespeaking a quiet confidence in the peerless quality of its street-style Thai food. Rarely is Thai food this impeccably executed: The sweet-tart tamarind pad thai with locally made tofu is charmingly served with little white paper packets of cane sugar, crushed peanuts, and roasted chilies so you can season your bowl to your preference, and it tastes fresh and alive rather than smothered in a syrupy, cloying sauce. To drink, there's

Dear Sun,

It's nice to see you again...it's been a while since we've hung out. Maybe we should meet up on the patio at the Ballroom in Fremont. They have that awesome giant pizza, and a bunch of beer, wine, and cocktail options. We could watch a game, or maybe just kick it.

Love,
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COURTESY OF LITTLE UNCLE

Little Uncle

house kombucha and fizzy hibiscus lime soda, iced QED espresso with condensed milk, and a self-serve dispenser with complimentary pandan tea, as well as cocktails, beer, and wine.

May Kitchen + Bar

The pure, primal delight of Thai food lies in the balance of flavors, that perfect harmony of sweet-spicy-sour-salty-bitter lighting up the pleasure center of your brain like a pinball machine. May Kitchen + Bar on Vashon Island takes that magic to another level with a beautiful bit of dinner theater—a tableside pad thai preparation where a server dresses your rice noodles before your eyes, asks you how you like yours, deftly flicks the corresponding amount of cane sugar, chili flakes, and crushed peanuts right onto your plate, and blends it all with lime juice and banana flowers (slender white tubular blossoms that create a puckeringly astringent sensation in your mouth). The whole thing is served wrapped in a banana leaf and with the fixings on the side, so you can adjust your own plate accordingly as you eat. It's so good, I could practically cry just thinking about it. The trip to Vashon is well worth it for this and various other pleasures on the menu.

more craveable than the last: crispy fried brussels sprouts, drunken mushrooms with spicy wide rice noodles, and a pineapple curry with chewy seitan, soft and fried tofu, and juicy pineapple chunks. The creamy, sweet, peanuty massaman curry with meltingly soft bananas is dreamy cold-weather comfort food, complete with roti to soak up the sauce. Gluttons, take note: There's a lunch buffet from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. daily, so you can gorge yourself on all the pad thai and tofu spring rolls you can handle.

Manao

This casual Thai eatery features an open kitchen and operates cafeteria-style, with service at the counter. "Manao" means lime, and the white tiled walls feature splashy bright-green limes and text querying, "How ya like manao?" Their menu focuses on street-style eats, like crispy, fatty pad prik khing pork belly with snappy green beans in a red curry paste sauce and ground chicken larb with pandan leaf sticky rice. The selection of hot sauces and spices at each table, offered in lieu of a star system so you can "spice it how you like it," are a nice touch.

SOI

Right off the bat, this Capitol Hill Thai eatery from husband-and-wife team Gabe Wiborg and Yuie Helseth makes its intentions clear: The website calls it "a departure from your normal expectations of Thai food in Seattle," declaring, "We believe that Seattle deserves better

Araya's Place

This establishment is completely vegan, but you won't be dwelling on the lack of anything while you're here. Instead, you'll be marveling over the abundance of diverse dishes on the menu, each

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Thai food and that folks are tired with the typical Thai food in Seattle.” And let’s be honest, who isn’t a little fatigued by the dizzying surfeit of mediocre curries? The departure in this case comes from the restaurant’s focus on the regional foods of Northeastern Thailand. Their signature dish is the delicious, belly-warming khao soi: a tangle of egg noodles in a puddle of rich, spicy-creamy coconut milk curry, topped with cilantro, lime, bean sprouts, onion, and a nest of crispy fried noodles.

Thai Tom

A longtime University District staple and student favorite, Thai Tom’s cacophonous, fragrant open kitchen allows you to take in the sizzling, fast-paced dance of the chefs working over an open flame to the soundtrack of music from the early ’00s and East Asian pop (if you’re lucky enough to snag a spot in the pint-sized space, that is). Those blazing woks impart the elusive smoky sear (the “breath of the wok,” the hallmark of a proper stir-fry) to Thai standards like drunken noodles, pad thai, and panang curry. Their spice levels pull no punches, and warnings abound—if you ask for five stars here, be ready to feel the heat.

Mai Thaiku

This Greenwood/Phinney eatery makes authentic, unadulterated Thai food not diluted for the standard American

palate, with all the bold, sharp, eye-wateringly hot flavors of Northern Thailand. The “gahp glam” menu of Thai-style drinking food features sai oua, house-made pork sausage served with cooling ginger slices, cabbage, and peanuts, and mieng kahm, an interactive appetizer that lets you bundle fresh ginger, lime, chilies, onions, peanuts, and toasted coconut into bai cha plu leaves. Meanwhile the “som tahn” menu includes no fewer than six different variations of papaya salad, a house specialty. Cool the burn with one of their medicinal, herbal cocktails (one with yohimbe is rumored to have libido-stirring properties).

Pestle Rock

This Ballard restaurant specializes in the fiery, pungent delicacies of the northeast Isan region of Thailand in a warm, colorful space with lots of wood and brick. Named after the grinding motion of a mortar and pestle blending chilies and herbs, Pestle Rock brings that same personal, hands-on touch to their food, encouraging diners to dig in with their hands, and dunk and mix their foods in a variety of fresh dipping sauces, accompaniments, and herbs to combine flavors as it’s done in Isan. Everything, from the sai ua (homemade sausage) to the muu yaang (grilled wild boar collar) is made from mindfully chosen ingredients and marinated, spiced and/or condimented with care.



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La Cabaña

RARE

JESSICA STEIN

Only the Lonely

These restaurants serve foods you'd be hard-pressed to find anywhere else in town.

BY NAOMI TOMKY

In a city where tacos abound, bánh mì shops spring up infinitely, and it's hard to go a few blocks without smelling Thai food, bucking the trend can be a dangerous move for a restaurateur. Only a few brave souls venture out into the city holding aloft a cuisine almost impossible to find anywhere else in town. But if Seattle wants to be the welcoming, multicultural town it claims to be—and also to eat uniquely great food—it needs to make haste to the places that dare to be different. Places like Mani's Kitchen, which offers Bhutanese food, La Teranaga for Senegalese

cuisine, Safari Njema for Kenyan tastes, and La Cabaña for Latin American comfort foods.

The owner of Greenwood's **La Cabaña**, Selvin Oseguera, hails from Honduras, but his menu lists dishes from wide swaths of Central America—whose comforting familiarity serves as a taste of home for other Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, and Salvadorans. While the greater Seattle area has at least one other Honduran restaurant and a Salvadoran bakery, La Cabaña is the only, lonely spot serving Guatemalan hilachas de carne or Nicaraguan buñuelos de

yuca.

La Cabaña, despite its website's claim to be in "the heart of Fremont," sits between Aurora and Greenwood at 105th, in a weird non-neighborhood, next to an old dive bar. While the exterior is unassuming and unremarkable, the inside evokes the sunshine of warmer climes, something matched by Oseguera's attitude as he drops menus, greets regulars, and switches between English and Spanish a half-dozen times in one tour of the dining room.

Instead of offering a broad array of different dishes, the

menu does something fascinating: It features versions of similar dishes as served in each different country. It caters to the people who care deeply about the difference between a Nicaraguan and a Costa Rican chicken salad. This suits customers who will not accept the Nicaraguan bistec encebollado (chunks of beef with a sauce of tomatoes and onions) when what they want is hilachas de carne (shredded beef with vegetables in a tomato sauce). About the only unifying factor is that almost everything, starting with the breakfast options, comes with freshly made tortillas that rank among the city's finest. Not the slim, supple Mexican tortillas that fold gently around tacos, but thick, beefy, warm Central American specimens that sop up the juicy meats and help ferry the comforting soups from bowl to mouth.

Just a dash further north, **Mani's Kitchen** in Pinehurst also serves the cuisines of a collection of countries. After tiring of the high prices and high pressure of operating their previous restaurant, Mani Chhetri and his wife, Sheila, escaped Capitol Hill, where they'd operated India Express, and migrated north. While much of the menu at the new spot resembles the previous one—and that of so many Indian restaurants—one page makes all the difference. Chhetri is Bhutanese, so the final page of the menu incorporates his experience with Bhutanese food, as well as Nepali, Tibetan, and Indo-Chinese. Newcomers should start with the ema datchi, the national dish of Bhutan; its name translates to "chili cheese," a perfect description: radish, meat, and potato with ample chopped peppers, quilted together with melted cheese. The non-Indian dishes on the menu take a bit more time, but the khasi ko masu (Nepali goat) and Bhutanese pha (mushrooms with meat)—brought to

La Teranga

in Columbia City



JESSICA STEIN

the table by Sheila with the kind of warmth and service that come only from years in the restaurant industry—set this spot apart from the myriad places serving warmed-over saag paneer.

Across town and from halfway around the world, two Columbia City restaurants offer a taste of Africa. Seattle wants not for Ethiopian or Eritrean food, and it even boasts a few Somalian restaurants, a South African teahouse, and a couple Egyptian cafes. But only **La Teranga** serves Senegalese food.

Once half of a pair of Senegalese restaurateurs in the neighborhood, owner Mamadou Diakhate alone now represents the West African nation. Like, really alone: He greets customers, cooks, and serves everyone in the tiny sliver of a space. His signature dish—and Senegal's national dish—thiebou djeun, features fish swimming in tomato sauce, served over rice and with vegetables. The lamb mafe, with its chunks of root vegetables afloat in a peanut gravy, emits some sort of universal comfort food pheromone, encouraging anyone and everyone to claim it tastes like home and grandma and safety. Washing it down with kinkeliba tea, pepper-spiked coffee, or a spicy ginger juice, though, firmly reminds diners that in Seattle, there's only one place for this.


Just up the street, chef Jane


Kagira runs **Safari Njema**, serving food from across the continent in Kenya. Kagira works magic with the Indian-influenced spices woven into Kenya's culinary DNA, whether dressing up pan-fried goat meat or stewing chicken thighs. Tilapia comes whole, the length of a forearm, and fried stiff as a board, with a sunshine-yellow sauce to liven up the otherwise ordinary fish. Diners are invited to mix and match their own starch and vegetables, but, when pressed, the server will patiently help you match the chewy, char-speckled chapati (flatbread) to the bone-in, onion-laden goat. The ugali, she says of the dough-like cooked cornmeal starch with a texture like yesterday's grits, goes well with the saucy chicken. But no matter if you pick matoke (green banana) or mukimo (verdant potatoes with split peas, corn, and greens), everything you order should get smothered under Kagira's house-made hot sauce. Almost as orange as the walls, the bold, citrusy condiment hides inside innocuous-looking squeeze bottles. Released onto the mild foods of Kagira's Kenyan kitchen, it burns with the fire and complexity of various peppers, muted not at all by the fragrant spices. This might be the only spot in Seattle to find Kenyan food, but it's definitely the only place in the world you'll find her hot sauce. ■

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